



Southeastern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.



November 18, 2020

To the Rostered Ministers, Leaders, and COVID Teams of the Southeastern MN Synod,

I am really looking forward to the day when I will write a letter that doesn't have the word *pandemic* in it.

Last week we heard Governor Walz instate some specific restrictions aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19. The governor did not require changes to gatherings around worship services but did make changes around the receptions that often accompany weddings and funerals. He also issued new guidelines concerning social gatherings in general.

Many of you, with your COVID teams in place, have already determined how you'll use these guidelines, along with rising confirmed case numbers, to help you make decisions about the ways you gather for worship.

Thank you for remaining flexible and attentive, and for changing course when necessary. I know it isn't easy.

I know we're tired and I know so many of us wish we could return to ways of gathering and worship and being together from pre-COVID days. Dear friends, I know it is hard. Keep going.

The best science indicates now is not the time to grow lax, now is not the time to act as though the worst of it is over, now is not the time to clamor for the way things were.[1]

My recommendation is that you dial back from in-person gatherings for at least a time and meet only via digital platforms. Case numbers are rising in Minnesota. Hospital beds are filling. Digital gatherings are the safest option from a public health standpoint. I trust your leadership. You know your context best. Make decisions in conversation with your fellow leaders.

There are still a myriad of ways to *be the church* outside our buildings. So many of you have already found ways to care for one another and your neighbors during this pandemic. Continue to think creatively about the ways you can remain connected: send cards, make phone calls, take your instruments outside and play a hymn. Think about what you have to offer and use your gifts, even now, in service to others.

Remain rooted in grace. Treat one another with compassion.

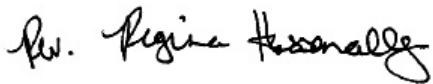
Pay attention to the data in your community and throughout the state. Do not be afraid to make changes when the data points indicate it is necessary to do so.

Of utmost importance is our continued willingness to make decisions for the good of others. As St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”[2] As you make decisions for your context, keep these words from Scripture in mind.

I know some of you are tired. I am too. I know many of you are frustrated about the ways this virus is impacting your daily life. I know so many of us want to be in our sanctuaries, together, for worship. We will gather in person again. It is just that now is not the time.

Dear friends, this pandemic will end. It just hasn’t ended yet. Hang in there. Continue to lead well, with integrity, compassion, and courage. I am with you and holding you in prayer.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bp. Regina Hassanally". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Bishop Regina Hassanally
Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

[1] If you’re wondering what sources I’m paying attention to: I regularly attend meetings for judicatory leaders with staff of the Minnesota Department of Health. I also listen to Dr. Michael Osterholm and other leading voices from the medical and infectious diseases communities.

[2] Philippians 2:3-4